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ABSTRACT

This booklet serves as a guide for city officials to use when evaluating the status and needs of children and families in their cities and planning services for them. The booklet is divided into five sections. The first section identifies the reasons that city officials should care about their city's children. The second section provides a list of indicators for determining the quality of life of city children and a list of resources where such information might be located. The third section provides questions that city officials can use when determining the city services which are being provided to children and families. The questions focus on services provided by city government and organizations outside of city government, the coordination of services, and the provision of leadership. The fourth section offers ideas for the development of a strategy for serving children and families and an approach to comprehensive planning. The last section provides three outlines for development of programs for children and families involving communities active in children and family issues; communities which are beginning to become involved in programs; and officials who are interested in addressing the issues but are uncertain of colleagues' support. (RJC)

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# YOUR CITY'S KIDS

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## ABOUT THE NLC CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN CITIES PROJECT

*NLC's* **Children and Families in Cities Project** *is an ongoing effort to encourage and assist local elected officials in meeting the needs of children and families.*

*The project, through a survey of many cities, is "mapping" city hall interests, involvement, and needs concerning issues affecting children and families, especially those living in poverty. The results will be published in 1989. The information obtained will permit NLC to develop assistance tailored to the needs of city hall officials. Other project activities include specialized workshops, publications including the booklet* Your City's Kids, *and a forthcoming handbook on evaluating local programs serving children and families. Funding for these activities is being provided by grants from Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Lilly Endowment, and the Rockefeller Foundation.*

*In 1987, as part of the project's planning phase, NLC published* Children, Families & Cities: Programs that Work at the Local Level, *a casebook of thirty-two model programs that can be adapted by other cities and towns, complete with contact information for each program and references to other organizations that offer advice and publications. Topics covered include strategic planning, youth employment, child care, teen pregnancy prevention, and child and family homelessness. Funding for this publication was provided by a grant from the Foundation for Child Development.*

*For copies of* Your City's Kids *(available at no charge to city officials) or information about project activities, contact:*

*John E. Kyle, Project Director*
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# WHY CARE ABOUT YOUR CITY'S KIDS?

There are many good reasons for caring about your city's kids. You no doubt have your own reasons, but here are some good ones to consider.

## YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE

Your city's kids are your kids. You know that today's children have tremendous opportunities, and you want to see them make the most of them. At the same time, you know that today's children are threatened by drugs, poverty, homelessness, and other problems – and that too often they face such problems on their own.

## YOU KNOW THAT CONDITIONS CHANGE

Technology and communications bring new ideas and extend horizons. Travel takes kids away from familiar places and faces. Working parents aren't always at home when they want to be. Divorce and changes in family size mean that the family isn't what it used to be.

## YOU'RE RESPONSIVE TO PUBLIC NEEDS

You know that the public's interest in issues affecting children and families is growing, and you respond to public concerns. Even though your municipal government may not be responsible for delivering the services, you know that you and city hall may still be able to play important roles.

YOU KNOW THAT FAMILIES ARE IMPORTANT TO YOUR CITY

Attracting workers and their families is important to your city's economy. Meeting the needs of children and families is an important part of making your city livable.

YOU KNOW THAT INVESTING PAYS OFF

Investments of time, thought, and leadership now will help prevent problems for your city's children, families, and communities tomorrow.

YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE

You know that today's children represent the future – the future of the nation and the future of your city.

# WHAT'S LIFE LIKE FOR THE KIDS IN YOUR CITY?

This is the start of a scouting expedition, or an investigation. It begins with basic information. The questions here won't take the place of a detailed survey of your community and its children and families. But they can start you thinking. And they can provide basic information that you can fashion into building blocks for your responses to the most immediate needs and that you can use as you eventually develop a comprehensive system.

Here are some indicators of the quality of life for your city's kids, some national statistics for comparison, and some sources of information.

- ❑ How many kids are there in your city? What ages are they? What kinds of households do they live in? Information from the U.S. Census Bureau, which publishes the *County and City Data Book*, can help you here.
- ❑ What proportion of your city's kids live in poverty? Nationally, more than 20 percent do, according to the Census Bureau, which can help you determine the percentage in your city. Or contact the National Resource Center for Children in Poverty (212/927-8793).
- ❑ How many incidents of child abuse are reported? The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse (312/663-3520) says that in many states child abuse and neglect reports have increased more than 50 percent since

1981; your county or state social services department can tell you about local child abuse reports.

- ❑ How many kids need child care? The Children's Defense Fund (202/628-8787) reports that 50 percent of all mothers with preschool children (9.5 million women) are in the labor force. Census figures or the Children's Defense Fund can help you with the number in your city.
- ❑ Is child care available? The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (507/287-2020) may be able to refer you to one of its members in your community; so could the National Association for the Education of Young Children (800/424-2460), which has 300 local affiliates.
- ❑ How many finish high school, how many drop out? In some poor, minority communities as many as 50 percent drop out. The Dropout Prevention Network (803/656-2599) may help you, if records from your school system don't.
- ❑ How many teenagers become parents each year? Nationally, more than a million teenage girls become pregnant each year; half of them have babies, half have abortions. The Children's Defense Fund (202/628-8787), the Center for Population Options (202/347-5700), or your local health department can help with the number in your city.
- ❑ What's the infant mortality rate in your city? Nationally, it is around 11 for every 1,000 births; your local health department or hospitals can help you with local statistics.
- ❑ Do programs like the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program or those for the homeless reach all the eligible residents in your community?
- ❑ How many kids are on the streets because they're runaways or homeless? The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services (202/682-4114) can give you

national figures; a visit to a local shelter or a talk with a local police officer may provide the local picture.

- ❑ Are teenage gangs or crime a problem in your community? Is it increasing or decreasing? The local juvenile court, juvenile justice advisory council, or police department can tell you.
- ❑ Does your community have work opportunities for kids? What kinds of jobs? Does the local Private Industry Council address the needs of teenagers?
- ❑ Where do kids go for fun in your community? Are those places safe for kids? What do kids themselves say about local opportunities for fun and recreation?

If you knew the answers to even a few of those questions about your city's kids, you've already been thinking about them. And if you could easily find the answers to any you didn't know, your local government or your community is aware of its children and families. Even the unanswered questions are useful: they provide a starting point for finding out more about the children and families in your community.

Here are some places you might go for answers:

- ❑ Local school boards, churches, hospitals, and chambers of commerce.
- ❑ Civic organizations, youth organizations, and their state and national counterparts.
- ❑ Local and state government agencies (police, public health, welfare, and employment departments) and your state government data center.
- ❑ Your own surveys (formal or informal). Officials in cities such as Seattle, Sacramento, St. Louis, and Rockford, Illinois, have conducted surveys of their residents. Some of

them have asked school children to complete one questionnaire and sent another one home to parents.

- ❑ Kids themselves—they're constituents, too, and sometimes they know what they need.
- ❑ The United Way, which has a national research office (703/836-7100).
- ❑ The U.S. Department of Education, which published *Youth Indicators 1988: Trends in the Well-Being of American Youth* (202/357-6172).

After you've collected this information about children and families in your community, it's time to analyze it in terms of what you want to happen next for these children and families.

If the number of children and families involved in child abuse or too-early parenting seems high, have you looked at the number and quality of prevention and education efforts, or at the amount of outreach in the community? Agency officials, the families for whom these programs were designed, and other community service providers might have some suggestions.

Is more child care needed in your community? Child care resource and referral programs have proven successful in stimulating the opening of new child care programs and in upgrading the quality of existing ones. They also provide a service for parents by linking them to available facilities. Also, a growing number of private employers are offering on-site child care, child care referral or vouchers, flexible working hours, and other help for working parents. These might be services you want to encourage.

Thinking about the answers to these questions will help you recognize how important implementation and organization are. These are tackled next.

## A SAMPLE WORKSHEET

Here is one way to organize your information gathering.

| Topics You Are Interested in | Comparison of Information Nationally | Locally | Resources: A Place to Call |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of children 0-18 | 70 million | _____ | Census Bureau; local government data center |
| Number of children in child care centers | 1.5 million | _____ | Census Bureau; local child care resource and referral agency |
| Births to teenagers | 13% of all births | _____ | Children's Defense Fund; local health department |
| Infant mortality | 11 per 1,000 live births | _____ | Local health department |
| High school dropouts | 681,820 per year | _____ | Local school system |
| Child abuse reports | 360,620 per year | _____ | Local social services department |
| Children in poverty | 1 in 5 children | _____ | Children's Defense Fund or Census Bureau |
| Others: | | | |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

# WHAT IS YOUR CITY DOING FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

Another task is to draw a map of the territory. The questions below can help you "map" what your city is currently doing for children and families. Because local government cannot possibly provide every needed service, "doing" includes far more than providing services or programs. It includes referring children and families to those who can provide the services they need, coordinating a wide range of policies and providers, or simply focusing awareness on the needs of children and families.

## IN CITY GOVERNMENT

In any local government, there are many departments and many people who come into contact with children and families. Some are involved because of their titles or job descriptions. Others are involved because what they do puts them in contact with children and families.

As a first task, you might want to ask these questions:

- ❑ Which departments and which people are involved with children and families? (These might include social services and health departments, social workers, and welfare offices. Or they might include the police department and beat cops, who encounter kids on the street or respond to domestic disputes or child abuse complaints; fire fighters who put out fires started by kids playing with matches; the

transit system and its bus drivers; and many others.) How many such agencies are there? Do their responsibilities intersect? Should they? Do they collaborate?

- ❑ Which departments affect the lives of children and families although they aren't solely set up to do so? Do your zoning definitions and regulations reflect today's changing families? Do the departments responsible for planning, zoning, and building inspection adequately promote your community's needs for child care facilities or group homes for abused children? Does your parks and recreation department have appropriate and sufficient programs for children, youth, and families?
- ❑ Are there municipal agencies or task forces created solely to deal with issues affecting children and families?
- ❑ Who in your local government does a child or a family come to first? Who are they referred to? If a child or a family needing help comes into the mayor's office—or your office—where do they go from there?

## OUTSIDE CITY GOVERNMENT

There are similar questions to ask about what happens outside local government:

- ❑ What local organizations exist specifically to deal with the problems of children and families?
- ❑ What roles do the public schools and their teachers play? Do the school systems respond to the needs of children and families beyond basic education? Should they? How?
- ❑ What local organizations, such as religious charities, deal with children and families as part of a broader mission?

- ❑ What local organizations, such as food banks, fraternal groups, and advocacy groups, affect the lives of children and families although that is not their specific function?

## ARE THESE EFFORTS COORDINATED?

You also need to know who is coordinating – or should be coordinating – community efforts.

- ❑ Is there regularly scheduled communication among agencies and officials dealing with children and families?
- ❑ Are there jointly sponsored projects involving multiple sources of funding or using joint powers agreements?
- ❑ Does local government share responsibility for programs with any private sector organizations?
- ❑ Does your local government cooperate with county, regional, and state governments or with neighboring local governments in ways that benefit children and families?
- ❑ Is there some kind of coordinating body within local government? Does it meet regularly with other local government agencies?
- ❑ What amount of joint ownership and shared resources is there?
- ❑ Do agencies work together or argue over turf, sometimes leaving gaps in services?

## WHO'S TAKING THE LEAD?

Coordination requires leadership. In some cases, you or one of your colleagues may be exerting leadership. In other cases, a department head or private citizen might be providing it. Remember, the role you play may depend on the issue. To iden-

tify the leadership that exists, you might think about these questions:

- ❑ Who is taking the lead in policy making?
- ❑ Who is taking the lead in coordinating existing efforts? How are they coordinated?
- ❑ Who is taking the lead in providing services?

Now that you have reviewed organizational issues as well as data on your city's children and families, you are ready to begin thinking about what you want your city to do.

# WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR CITY TO BE DOING?

If the previous section was a scouting expedition, this one is a preliminary strategy session. Your city may already have a comprehensive strategy for children and families. But if it doesn't, the ideas here can help you come up with the beginnings of one – a sense of where you want, or need, to go and some ideas about getting there.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF A STRATEGY

Comprehensive planning and coordination are not something above or separate from single project implementation; they are part of it As much as possible, overall planning questions should be asked and answered even as projects are initiated. Both can be undertaken at the same time.

This booklet doesn't pretend to give you more than the beginnings of how to approach planning. We're going to suggest some things you need to know if you are to develop a strategy.

Forging an effective comprehensive local plan for children and families requires that you know the needs, know the goals, know the resources, know the people, and know the issues.

**Know the needs.** Find out about the children and families in your community. The information gathered earlier needs to be reexamined in order to make sound decisions about what to do and how to do it. Which pieces of information intersect with other

pieces? A pregnant teenager, for example, doesn't just need health care; she probably also needs to complete school, find a job, or both – which in turn require some kind of child care. You need a clear view of the problems of your community's children and families, because the view of a problem shapes its solution.

You also need to know who the problem affects (ages, neighborhoods, special populations) and if different problems affect some of the same people. The latter is one of the most compelling reasons for coordination – to make sure that a person isn't helped on one problem just to be knocked down by another that the first intervention wasn't designed to help or wasn't even aware of.

And don't forget to ask the kids themselves. In Columbus, Ohio, and Sacramento, officials decided to ask local kids how things should be designed to suit kids; the answers they got surprised them – and proved useful.

**Know the goals.** Once you review the information about what life is like for children and families, it is important to translate it into goals. What do you want to see done about these conditions? What role can your city government take? What role can you play?

**Know the resources.** Find out what your local government is already doing, and what local civic, charitable, and other organizations are doing. An inventory like this can help you discover where there are gaps – or overlaps – in local services.

**Know the people.** Identify the individuals who are involved in these issues or who have a vested interest in them. These could include, for example, those who are employed in programs for children and business owners who benefit from well-prepared young workers.

Discussing your concerns and ideas with professionals, parents, agency officials, citizen leaders, and children and youth themselves will give you a chance to hear all sides of the issues. It will help you be sure that the issue or solution you are considering is a real one for your community, and it will give you an idea of what sort of support you can expect in working out the problem.

**Know the issues.** They aren't simple, or they would have been dealt with already. Some of them will prove to be controversial, but they are ultimately inescapable. Facing them squarely can require political courage as well as good intentions and good information. Here is a brief look at some of the issues you need to think about as you make plans for children and families.

- **Child care:** How do you make it affordable for everyone, available when and where it's needed, and at the same time make sure that those who provide it are well qualified and paid accordingly?

  Some cities, like Madison, Wisconsin, provide municipally funded child care and subsidize child care fees. Others, like Denver, assist their employees who have child care needs, setting an example for local employers. In Dallas, the mayor sparked the creation of a nonprofit agency to improve the quality of child care. Developers in Hartford, Connecticut, can earn bonus space by including child care facilities in their buildings. The Decatur, Georgia, "Animal Crackers" program, and a similar one in Virginia Beach, Virginia, demonstrate city hall support of child care for latchkey children – children often left alone while parents are at work.

- **Teen parenthood:** Helping teenagers avoid too-early parenthood is only one side of the issue, and the one the public may be most attuned to. But preparing teenagers

for eventual parenthood is just as important.

In Atlanta, for example, the Cities in School program helps teenagers develop skills, raise their self-esteem, set priorities, and make decisions in order to prevent early pregnancies. In Leslie, Michigan, a Family Learning Center teaches young parents how to cope with parenthood and coordinates a wide range of services for them. Albuquerque's New Futures School, started 18 years ago in the basement of the YWCA, offers teenage parents education, health, counseling, job training, and child care services.

- **Education:** Education is a key factor in preventing many of the other problems that confront children and families. Investments in early childhood education pay off in reduced social costs. That's been demonstrated in a highly acclaimed early childhood education program in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

  Another troubling problem of our times is adult illiteracy—a problem that starts in childhood. Giving kids a reason to stay in school is part of a Houston program in which Tenneco adopted a high school and provides tutoring, volunteers, inspiration, and subsidized jobs for students. Another public-private partnership is promoting education in Tupelo, Mississippi, by raising funds to support education improvements beyond the reach of the regular school budget. In Phoenix and Boston, education task forces are advising the mayors on educational improvements.

- **Employment:** For teenagers, education and employment are closely linked. Teenagers need jobs for a variety of reasons, and the need for—or the lure of—employment is strong enough to pull many out of school. But in the long

run, and the short run, too, they need an education to qualify for satisfactory jobs. The best youth employment programs don't compete with school.

In Chicago, Jobs for Youth is taking on the triple task of training youths for specific jobs, keeping them in school, and helping them make the transition from school to adult life. Other good examples are the Jobs for Bay State Graduates program in Massachusetts and the Enterprise High program in Mt. Clemens, Michigan, that keeps kids in school by engaging them in business ventures.

- **Homelessness:** Homelessness is another problem that requires comprehensive solutions—adequate and affordable housing, jobs and job training, and, in the short run, public assistance to stave off eviction, utility cutoffs, and other problems that can lead to homelessness. Homeless children, however, need services tailored to their specific needs, especially if they are runaways, abandoned, or otherwise on their own.

  One broad approach is found in the Washington, D.C., program known as ConServe. This consortium of ten local agencies helps families find affordable homes of their own.

  Teenagers on the street in Louisville, Kentucky, can take refuge anywhere they see a Project Safe Place sign. Besides providing refuge, Project Safe Place works to prevent and alleviate homelessness. Homeless children and their families are the focal point of Chicago's Salvation Army Nursery and Home Visiting Program, which helps them recover from homelessness and prevent its recurrence.

- **Poverty:** Children and families living in poverty are doing without in all aspects of their lives – housing, food, child care. Nothing less than a multifaceted approach will enable such families to get out of poverty.

  In Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee, a project called "Free the Children: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty" is focusing on antidiscrimination, economic development, education, health care, housing, the law, and social services. The Urban Strategies Council in Oakland, California, is one of many city projects working to eliminate persistent poverty.

- **Drugs and alcohol:** Today's young people are besieged with temptations to try alcohol and drugs. The substance of choice may change from crack to beer to cocaine to marijuana, depending on cost and on police crackdowns, but the enticements to youth are real and continuing.

  Cities as diverse as Cedar Falls, Iowa, and Los Angeles support the Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program (D.A.R.E.), a drug abuse education and prevention program aimed at fifth and sixth graders. Its goal is to reduce the demand for drugs by educating children about them before they become involved with them.

## AN APPROACH TO PLANNING

You'll have to develop your own specific objectives to suit your own local situation. But whatever area you are considering for immediate action, you can rest assured that other communities like yours are facing similar problems and may have learned some lessons that can benefit you. NLC's book, *Children, Families & Cities: Programs that Work at the Local Level*, can be a valuable resource for learning about successful models.

At the broadest level, the aim is a city, town, or community that offers its children and families health, safety, and opportunity. A few years back, Seattle, Washington, set out to do just that. Today, the city's KidsPlace program is making the city attractive to families and safe for their children. In Sacramento, California, a comprehensive survey of children and parents is now influencing many aspects of city planning and residential and commercial development. City governments in Dayton, Ohio; Little Rock; Savannah; Pittsburgh; and Lawrence, Massachusetts, have used the *Strategic Planning Guide,* published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (203/661-2773).

More specifically, the aim is a local government that has a coordinated policy to help children and families take advantage of opportunities and surmount dangers. In Minneapolis, for example, a Youth Coordinating Board made up of eleven elected officials representing the city's seven elected bodies encourages coordination among public agencies dealing with children and families. The Board has leveraged new support for youth in the areas of employment, school health services, and early childhood development. In Indianapolis, the mayor created a model for comprehensive coordination that will build a bridge between various systems of services. At a minimum, these would include the schools, recreation, mental health, social services, juvenile justice, and health.

The value of comprehensive planning is clear because the individual problems do not exist separate from each other. Your most effective and most preferable approach to dealing with them – or to offering opportunities to children and families – will be comprehensive and coordinated. However, in addition to this reality of achieving optimum value, you must be mindful of political and fiscal realities. These combined realities may lead to one step, several steps, or many steps. Remember that any one step is important and positive.

# WHAT NEXT?

This is where everything comes together. But it will come together differently in different communities. What you do, after all, depends on who you are and where you are. Here, then, are some ideas appropriate for three different situations you might find yourself in. And remember, you don't have to wait for a comprehensive plan before you tackle the immediate problems.

## THREE DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

**If you and your community are already active** in the area of children and family issues, you may want to:

- ❑ Monitor progress, evaluate results, and give successful programs high visibility.
- ❑ Institutionalize successful efforts.
- ❑ Make sure that children and families are represented in all municipal policies.
- ❑ Look for ways to extend the reach of current programs.
- ❑ Keep an eye out for new needs and opportunities.
- ❑ And above all, work towards a comprehensive program.

**If you and your community are just starting to get involved** in children and family issues, you may want to:

- ❑ Identify the most pressing needs.

- ❑ At the same time, start work on a coordinated comprehensive plan, so that your efforts to meet the most pressing needs will be part of your overall plan.
- ❑ Be sure to involve neighborhoods and schools.
- ❑ Include prevention of problems in your plans.
- ❑ As you consult with groups outside local government, look for opportunities for public-private partnerships.

**If you're interested, but you're not sure your colleagues in local government are,** you may want to:

- ❑ Openly discuss the issues.
- ❑ Make a case for local government involvement. Cost-effectiveness is one good argument: it's less expensive in the long run to prevent problems than to solve them.
- ❑ Start by surveying needs and resources in your city and comparing these with a similar city.
- ❑ Convene meetings to enlist the aid of local civic and charitable groups, school officials, and neighborhood leaders.
- ❑ Remember that there is truth in cliches. The first step is often the hardest, and very often it really does take just one involved person to make something happen.

Regardless of the situation you and your community are in, you, as a local official, are uniquely situated to help make your community a safe, healthy, and satisfying place for children and families. With your participation and your leadership, your city and the people who live and work in it can meet the needs of children and families—whether you set out to develop a comprehensive citywide program for children and families or to tackle the single most urgent of today's problems.

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

*The National League of Cities was established in 1924 by and for reform-minded state municipal leagues. It now represents 49 leagues and more than 1,300 cities directly, and through the membership of the state municipal leagues, 17,000 cities indirectly.*

*NLC serves as an advocate for its members in Washington, D.C., in the legislative, administrative, and judicial processes that affect them; develops and pursues a national urban policy that meets the present and future needs of our nation's cities and the people who live in them; offers training, technical assistance, and information to municipal officials to help them improve the quality of local government in our urban nation; and undertakes research and analysis on topics and issues of importance to the nation's cities.*